

LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY

[11] The last Caribs in Dominica to speak the native Indian idiom as their mother tongue died some 20 to 25 years ago. But even 60 years ago, at the time of Ober's first visit, the language was employed only by a small minority of older men and women. The urge for economic contacts with the Creole-negro population surrounding them continued, in all probability, with the priests' disapproval of continued isolation of a flock whose conversion was henceforth secure, ended in the adoption of that lingua franca of the West Indies, Creole patois. Those Caribs who today remember some smattering of their fathers' and mothers' tongue regard such knowledge rather in the light of a joke.

[12] Whether the proverbial distinction between the men's and the women's languages persisted to the end is hard to say, but it is certain that some of the words given below belong to the Carib, and others—the majority—to the Arawak stock of languages. Creole patois itself is rich in the debris of many tongues and it is to be hoped that some philologist will soon undertake its excavation.

[13] The following vocabulary is neither exhaustive of living linguistic vestiges nor is the whole of it necessarily known to any one person now living in the Reserve. My chief informants were: Jimmy (Dorder) Benjamin of Bataka and his brother, Jean Noël (now dead), "Fanfan" and Ma' Bernard of St. Cyr, Lucien of Walpina, Ma' Henri and her sister Ma' Janney of Bataka, and Choline and Chief Jolly John of Ste. Marie, Salybia. The latter furnished me with the song and some of the words, but was especially helpful in acting as my host, guide, and sponsor in the Reserve.

[14] The words have been put down as they were given me—in their final form only after hearing them repeated many times by different people. Other vocabularies (in particular that of Father Raymond Breton, published 1865) have been consulted only as a check to word meaning and form. The spelling, as with all unwritten idioms, has been rather a problem. Breton wrote Carib like French, but tat the text, and apart from the fact that French pronunciation has changed since his time, such a method is clumsy. I very much regret not having had a recording apparatus, but have done my best with the means at my disposal. In general, and taking the following modifications into account, the vowels have been given their Latin values, while the consonants are as in English. Stress is denoted by the apostrophe, as in supplementary.

a, as in father; an, as in law; ã, as in Portuguese "ão".

ê, as indefinite vowel sound in mother; becomes nasal when final.

â, as "an" in French; â, as in eat.

e, as in wet; ê, as em (final) in Portuguese.

ô, as in French, etc.

off Spirit. The missionaries exhausted themselves in vain in the 17th century in trying to inculcate in them the principles of Christianity and several were massacred on the island of St. Vincent, so that by the beginning of the 18th century they had given up converting them. The Caribs sometimes let themselves be baptized because for them it was an occasion for celebration and drinking, in addition to which the governors or the principal inhabitants of the French islands took pleasure in serving as their godparents and showered them with gifts; but hardly had they reached home then they forgot all the instruction they had received. "The reason for the small success of the missionaries in the conversion of the Caribs," says Father Duterre, "is the unfortunate impression which the life of the Christians had made on them, stained with cruelty and exhibiting habits more barbaric than those of the islanders." Today the remaining Caribs are Catholics, like most of the blacks of Dominica and their chief has even placed a portrait of the Pope in a conspicuous place in his house. French priests serve as their pastors and there existed at Salybia, the principal settlement of the territory, a little church which was blown down by a cyclone and which they are engaged in /143/ rebuilding. Next to it is the only school in the region, attended by young Caribs and young mestizos of both sexes.

191 The Caribs of Dominica are truly polyglot; they speak the French patois with the blacks, which is the same in this island as in Guadeloupe and Martinique; they know a few English words which they use in their relations with officials or various merchants; finally, among themselves, they still make use of a certain number of words of their ancestral language, a language which includes, as we have already seen, two idioms, one spoken by the men, the other by the women.

115 One of my colleagues, born and long since settled in Dominica but of a French family and having pursued his medical studies in France, Dr. Daniel Thally was kind enough to give me a Carib vocabulary which he collected in 1916 and 1918 from an old native woman, the daughter of Jean-Baptiste and Marie-Louise, named 197 Rosalie who was between 75 and 80 years old. This vocabulary, 192 carefully studied on my return to France with the learned collaboration of Dr. Rivet, allowed us to recover from it some words of the Carib vocabulary of the Antilles as it was in the time of /145/ Father Breton (1), who has left us a grammar and a dictionary of this